

# Press Release

U.S. Department of Homeland Security *Press Office*

January 3, 2006  
Contact: DHS Press Office, (202) 282-8010

## DHS RELEASES NATIONWIDE INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS ASSESSMENT

WASHINGTON – The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today released scorecard assessments of interoperable communications capabilities in 75 urban and metropolitan areas nationwide. Interoperable communications involve policies, technology and training that enable law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services from multiple jurisdictions in a common community to effectively communicate within one hour of an incident.

“The 9/11 Commission identified interoperable communications as a major challenge and many communities listened by taking the sometimes difficult steps necessary to close communication gaps among first responders,” said Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. “Their experience proves that basic interoperability at the command level is achievable. We’re committed to making this a priority in every major urban area, and we’ll continue to push for closing these gaps by the end of 2008.”

Since 2003, DHS has awarded \$2.9 billion in funding to enhance state and local interoperable communications efforts. While scorecard findings will not directly impact homeland security grant funding, the department expects eligible communities will use the scorecard to target their investment justifications and improve interoperable communications capabilities.

The reviews focused on three main areas: Governance (leadership and strategic planning); Standard Operating Procedures (plans and procedures); and Usage (use of equipment). The evaluation criteria was derived directly from the SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum and Interoperability Maturity Assessment Model that depicts the key components of interoperability – governance, standard operating procedures, usage, technology, and training and exercises.

1/3/2007

The findings identify gaps and areas for improvement. Key findings include:

- Policies for interoperable communications are now in place in all 75 urban and metropolitan areas.
- Regular testing and exercises are needed to effectively link disparate systems and facilitate communications between multi-jurisdictional responders (including state and federal).
- Cooperation among first responders in the field is strong, but formalized governance (leadership and strategic planning) across regions is not as advanced.

The scorecards illustrate the current capability for each area and provide recommendations for improvement. The reviews were conducted by five panels of subject matter experts composed of state and local public safety and communications technology experts, in addition to representatives from the department's Wireless Management Office and SAFECOM, a communications program within the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility.

###



BACK

PRINT

## Feds: Crisis Communications Subpar In U.S.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 2, 2007

(CBS/AP) Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff will release the findings of a new report Wednesday that finds that five years after 9/11, many U.S. cities still have ineffective disaster communications plans, CBS News has learned.

Seventy-five metropolitan areas, all of which have adopted "policies for interoperable communications" were evaluated with widely varying results, reports CBS News correspondent Bob Orr.

The six regions scoring the highest were San Diego; Columbus, Ohio; Minneapolis-St. Paul; Washington; Sioux Falls, S.D.; and Laramie County, Wyo.

Among those scoring poorly were Chicago, Baton Rouge, La., and Cleveland.

Areas were judged on the ability of fire and police departments and paramedics to effectively communicate and how effectively local, state and federal governments have coordinated in preparation for a disaster.

Homeland Security is under the gun to improve emergency communications among first responders, and Chertoff has pledged to achieve nationwide interoperability by the end of 2008.

The Department of Homeland Security study comes five years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, revealed major problems in how well emergency agencies were able to talk to each other during a catastrophe. Many firefighters climbing the World Trade Center towers died when they were unable to hear police radio warnings to leave the crumbling buildings.

In New York now, the report said, first responders were found to have well-established systems to communicate among each other — but not the best possible.

Just over a year ago, Hurricane Katrina underscored communication problems when radio transmissions were hindered because the storm's winds toppled towers.

Democrats have said they will make improving emergency communications a priority when they take control of Congress this week, though they have not said specifically what they will do, how much it will cost or how they will pay for it.

In the study, communities were judged in three categories: operating procedures in place, use of communications systems and how effectively local governments have coordinated in preparation for a disaster.

Most of the areas surveyed included cities and their surrounding communities, based on the assumption that in a major crisis emergency personnel from all local jurisdictions would respond.

The areas with the six best scores were judged "advanced" in all three categories. The cities with the lowest grades had reached the early implementation stage for only one category.

Chicago, Cleveland and Baton Rouge, for example, were judged to have accomplished the early stage of governance coordination. Mandan, N.D., and the territory of American Samoa were both found to have gotten to the early stage of their actual usage of interoperable emergency communications.

© MMVII, CBS Interactive Inc. All Rights Reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

➤ [Feedback](#) ➤ [Terms of Service](#) ➤ [Privacy Statement](#)



Powered by Clickability

## Report: Cities' communications still lacking

Updated 1/3/2007 9:32 AM ET

By Mimi Hall, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Emergency responders in most cities don't have the equipment and skills needed to communicate with each other during a crisis, according to a report to be released today by the Homeland Security Department.

Only six of the 75 cities and regions surveyed received top scores for "interoperability," or the ability to reliably communicate by radio. They were Washington, D.C., and its suburbs; San Diego; Columbus, Ohio; Minneapolis-St. Paul; Sioux Falls, S.D.; and Laramie, Wyo.

The report comes more than five years after the 9/11 attacks highlighted communications problems among fire, police and other emergency responders in New York City, at the Pentagon and at the crash site in Somerset County, Pa. The problems were especially acute at the World Trade Center, where firefighters couldn't hear police warnings to get out of the towers before they collapsed.

"One of the dramatic lessons of 9/11 was the cost in human life when we do not have at least command-level interoperability in cities and in regions," Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said last month.

Chertoff said the country has made "a significant amount of progress" toward better communication systems. But in regions where there are still gaps, he said, leaders of cities and towns with incompatible systems need to work to develop a better system that would help communication during a disaster.

Since 2003, Homeland Security has handed out \$2.9 billion in grants for interoperable communications systems, and Chertoff said his department's grant programs will be heavily focused on communications improvements over the next two years.

The survey, he said, was designed to identify the gaps so they can be closed "as quickly as possible."

The lowest scores on the report went to Chicago; Cleveland; Baton Rouge; Mandan, N.D.; and American Samoa. New York City scored in the middle.

Outgoing House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Pete King, R-N.Y., said communities immediately outside New York City have numerous communications systems that are incompatible with each other. That's also true in several other major urban areas, he said. "A lot of progress has been made," King said. But the report shows "how difficult an issue this is."

Congressional Democrats, who assume leadership of Congress on Thursday, are expected to address the issue as part of a campaign promise to pass all the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. The commission in 2004 cited the urgent need for "compatible and adequate communications among public safety organizations."

**Find this article at:**

[http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-01-02-cities-communications\\_x.htm?POE=NEWISVA](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-01-02-cities-communications_x.htm?POE=NEWISVA)

# Report details poor emergency communications

By DEVLIN BARRETT  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Only six of 75 U.S. metropolitan areas won the highest grades for their emergency agencies' ability to communicate during a disaster, five years after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, according to a federal report obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press.

A draft portion of the report, to be released Wednesday, gives the best ratings to Washington, D.C.; San Diego; Minneapolis-St. Paul; Columbus, Ohio; Sioux Falls, S.D.; and Laramie County, Wyo.

The lowest scores went to Chicago; Cleveland; Baton Rouge, La.; Mandan, N.D.; and American Samoa. The report included large and small cities and their suburbs, along with U.S. territories.

In an overview, the report said all 75 areas surveyed have policies in place for helping their emergency workers communicate. But it cautioned that regular testing and exercises are needed "to effectively link disparate systems."

It also said while cooperation among emergency workers is strong, "formalized governance (leadership and planning) across regions has lagged."

The study, conducted by the Homeland Security Department, was likely to add fuel to what looms as a battle in Congress this year. Democrats who take over the majority this week have promised to try fixing the problem emergency agencies have communicating with each other but have not said specifically what they will do, how much it will cost or how they will pay for it.

"Five years after 9/11, we continue to turn a deaf ear to gaps in interoperable communications," — the term used for emergency agencies' abilities to talk to each other, said Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y. "If it didn't have such potentially devastating consequences, it would be laughable."

Homeland Security spokesman Russ Knocke would not comment on the report, saying only that in releasing it on Wednesday, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff will "talk about nationwide assessments for interoperable communications."

The attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, revealed major problems in how well emergency agencies were able to talk to each other during a catastrophe. Many firefighters climbing the World Trade Center towers died when they were unable to hear police radio warnings to leave the crumbling buildings.

In New York now, the report said, first responders were found to have well-established systems to communicate among each other — but not the best possible. Thirteen U.S. cities scored better than New York.

Just over a year ago, Hurricane Katrina underscored communication problems

## COMMUNICATIONS REPORT ON THE WEB

For detailed results, including Montana's only rating, which was from Yellowstone County, visit <http://wid.ap.org/documents/dhs.pdf>

when radio transmissions were hindered because the storm's winds toppled towers.

A separate report the Homeland Security Department released last month found that emergency workers from different agencies are capable of talking to each other in two-thirds of 6,800 U.S. communities surveyed.

But David Boyd, who heads the Homeland Security office that conducted the study, said in an interview that only about 10 percent of them have systems so fully developed that they can communicate with them routinely. That survey did not name the cities that provided data.

In the study to be released on Wednesday, communities were judged in three categories: operating procedures in place, use of communications systems and how effectively local governments have coordinated in preparation for a disaster.

Overall, 16 percent of the communities were given the highest score for the communications procedures they have in place and 1 percent got the lowest rating.

Nineteen percent got the top grade for their plans for coordinating during a disaster and 8 percent received the worst; and 21 percent got the best mark for how well they use their communications equipment while 4 percent got the bottom rating.

Most of the areas surveyed included cities and their surrounding communities, based on the assumption that in a major crisis emergency personnel from all local jurisdictions would respond.

Los Angeles got advanced grades in procedures and use of emergency communications systems and a well-developed grade in coordination of governance.

San Francisco, by comparison, received intermediate grades in governance and procedures, and a well-developed grade in use of systems.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, \$2.9 billion in federal grant money has been distributed to state and local first responders for the improvement of their emergency communications systems.

Congress has ordered that the television broadcast industry vacate a portion of the radio spectrum to make it available for public safety communications. Lawmakers have also created a new office at the Homeland Security Department to oversee the issue, though they have yet to provide money for it.

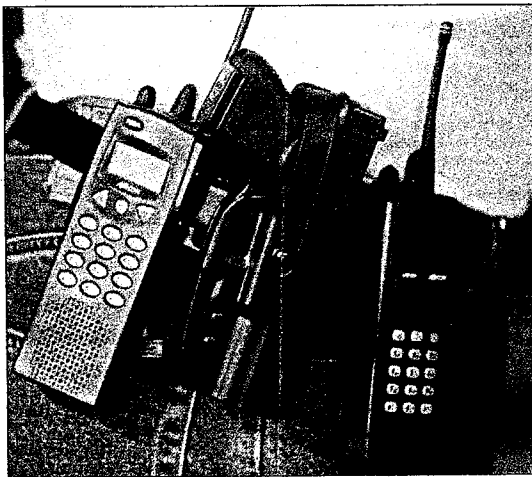
The areas with the six best scores were judged advanced in all three categories. The cities with the lowest grades had reached the early implementation stage for only one category, and intermediate levels for the other two categories.

Chicago, Cleveland and Baton Rouge, for example,

were judged to have accomplished the early stage of government coordination. Mandan, N.D., and the territory of American Samoa were both found to have gotten to the early stage of their actual usage of interoperable emergency communications and rated intermediate in governance and procedures.

Tammy Lapp, the emergency coordinator for Mandan and Morton County, N.D., said she was not surprised by the low ranking.

"We knew with our limited funds, we were going to fall short," she said.



A New Orleans police officer is seen carrying two different models of radios in New Orleans in this Sept. 13, 2005, file photo. Only six of 75 U.S. cities and surrounding areas rate top grades for their emergency agencies' ability to communicate during a disaster, according to a federal report obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press